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**THE LEADERSHIP DECISION AND NECESSITY TO USE
NUCLEAR WEAPONS TO END WORLD WAR II**

by

**Tommy Dillard, Jr.
Lieutenant Colonel, U S A F**

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN

FULFILLMENT OF THE CURRICULUM

REQUIREMENT

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MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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Part I. INTRODUCTION

The Second World War was the beginning of a new era in modern warfare for the United States and the world. America, England, Russia and the other allied nations banded together to defeat Hitler's Germany. This era also marked what became known as the beginning of the atomic age. Modern warfare as the world had known it would never be the same again.

America and the coalition faced the unique challenge of fighting a two theater war. Providing adequate logistic support and war resources to both theaters focused their attention toward the nuclear option. Faced with the decision of diverting essential resources from Europe to the Pacific strengthened the consideration and necessity for using nuclear weapons. And for the first time in history, the world had the option of initiating nuclear warfare.¹

The purpose of the research paper is to examine the leadership's decision and the necessity for using the atomic bomb in World War II. This examination will focus on the key American and coalition leaders orchestrating the Second World War. The military and strategic objectives developed by these leaders and the necessity to use nuclear weapons will be explored.

The overriding aim of the complete defeat of all coalition enemies ruled out most other options of ending World War II. This strategic decision translated into "total war" and the total defeat of both Germany and Japan. Practically speaking, this

amounted to aiming at unconditional surrender. The use of the atomic bomb played a major role to bring about this profound determination of coalition leadership. Was the use of nuclear weapons necessary to achieve total coalition victory or were there other factors influencing this decision? Was the decision to use the world's most powerful weapon shared equally among allied leaders or did a few key leaders of the nations possessing the only atomic weapons make the decision that changed nuclear warfare?

Part II. THE SETTING

The war in Europe was long and costly in both lives and resources for the U.S. and the coalition. However, on 9 May 1945, it was finally over when German General Keitel Stumpff (acting on behalf of von Greim) and von Friedeburg signed the surrender documents, witnessed by Tedder, Spaatz and Chuikov. At midnight on that same day, the fighting ceased in all of Europe.² The coalition had been victorious.

This victory left great apprehension for the future of the world on the minds of allied leaders. The Hitler ordeal had vanished in a blaze of glory for the U.S. and her allies. The powerful enemy that the coalition fought for more than five years had surrendered unconditionally. The only tasks remaining for the three victorious powers were to make a just and durable peace, bring our fighting men home to their loved ones and to embark upon an age of progress and prosperity. There were however, other factors to consider. Japan was still unconquered and the atomic bomb was yet to be developed.³

America was faced with fighting to the finish another enemy in the Pacific who commanded forces of over 5,000,000 armed men. More than 300,000 American casualties had already suffered at the hands of this formidable enemy. Fighting the war in the Pacific was just as costly as the prior phase in Europe. The war with Japan had to be as short as possible to avoid the potential for enormous loss of life. The U.S. adopted a policy to move towards this end.

America's political and military objectives focused on the prompt and complete surrender of Japan. Political and military leaders believed that only the complete destruction of Japan's military power could open the way for lasting peace. By July, 1945, Japan's military power had been seriously weakened by the U.S.'s increasingly violent air attacks. Even in this weaken state, there was still no indication of any weakening in the Japanese determination to fight rather than accept unconditional surrender.⁴

The Government of Japan's refusal to surrender would force allied forces to take and hold ground to defeat the Japanese ground forces. This close-in fighting would add tremendously to an already enormous loss of human life. The decision to use the atomic bomb became a viable consideration for both military and national leaders.

Part III. MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS FOR NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The coalition that fought the Second World War was probably the most successful alliance in history. By May, 1945, Germany had surrendered and coalition troops in Europe were available for redeployment to the Pacific theater. The Soviet Union, however, had not yet decided to declare war on Japan. Other coalition nations and specifically American political and military leaders were faced with developing a strategy that would bring about the unconditional surrender of Japan. A strategy that for the most part would be carried out by the U.S. The strategic plans U.S. military leaders developed in July, 1945 calling for the unconditional surrender of Japan were prepared without the reliance upon the atomic bomb.⁵ Japan had showed no indication of surrendering. Military plans were therefore based on the assumption that an invasion of the home islands was required to achieve our objective. Japanese military had been seriously weakened by this time. However, allied intelligence reports indicated there was still no signs the Japanese government might stop their resistance.

Japan was portrayed by allied intelligence as "a badly defeated nation whose military leaders were blind to defeat". By this time, most of Japan's industry has been seriously crippled by the effects of aerial bombardment and naval blockades. Japan's armed forces were critically deficient in many war resources but still possessed the will to fight. Japanese troops had demonstrated time and time again they could fight hard

and inflict heavy casualties even when the outlook was hopeless.⁶ Japan still had a large supply of weapons, ammunition reserves and an army of over 5,000,000 troops. Of those troops, 2,000,000 were on the home islands. These troops were expected to put up a strong defense against an invasion. In the opinion of intelligence experts, neither blockade nor bombing alone would produce unconditional surrender before the date set for the invasion.⁷

Prior to the invasion, military plans called for intensified sea and air blockades and intensified strategic air bombing. Air bombardment started early in 1945 and continued through the summer into fall. Admiral Leahy could see no justification for the invasion of an already "defeated nation". The cost would be too enormous in both lives and resources. Admiral King agreed with Leahy and believed that the defeat of the Japanese could be accomplished by sea and air power without the necessity of actual invasion of the home islands of Japan by ground forces.⁸

The plan devised by military leaders did not include the nuclear option. Their plan called for an assault against Kyushu 1 November 1945 and against Honshu five months later. MacArthur strongly favored this plan which permitted full application of ground, naval and air resources. He believed an invasion at this time would put the U.S. in a favorable position and would be more difficult later. The air campaign to him was an unproven formula as was evidence by the bomber offensive against Germany. The Joint Chiefs tasks as then to persuade President Truman to

approve a home island invasion.

General Marshall was faced with presenting the military's case for invasion to the President. Truman's decision to invade Kyushu as planned and to continue planning for Honshu included concerns for loss of lives on both sides and the feasibility of using the atomic bomb. Truman approved the following plans:

1. Air bombardment and blockade of Japan from bases in Okinawa, Iwo Jima, the Marianas and the Philippines.
2. Assault of Kyushu on 1 November 1945 and intensification of blockade and air bombardment.
3. Invasion of the industrial heart of Japan through the Tokyo plain in central Honshu with a tentative target date of 1 March 1946.⁹

During this White House meeting, military consideration was given to the use of the atomic bomb. The Joint Chiefs were aware of the atomic bomb's potential based on the recommendations the Interim Committee presented to the President. None of the Joint Chiefs thought well of the atomic bomb. They presented the argument that no one could be certain in spite of the assurances from our scientists that the bomb would actually go off.¹⁰ For this reason, military leaders ruled out the use of nuclear warfare to defeat Japan. If nuclear warfare were to be used, the decision would come from another source.

Part IV. LEADERSHIP'S DECISION TO USE THE ATOMIC BOMB

The decision to use the atomic bomb began as early as September, 1945 when Roosevelt appointed a committee to study the military employment of atomic energy. The policy presented and adopted by President Roosevelt of sparing no effort in the

earliest possible development of an atomic weapon would impact the decision to use it later. Germany's successful experimental achievement of atomic fission in 1938 influenced this decision. In 1941 and 1942, Germany's atomic energy program was believed to be ahead of the U.S. It was vital Germany not be the first to bring atomic weapons into the field of battle. Additionally, if the U.S. developed the weapon first, it could be used as an instrument to "shorten the war and minimize destruction". At no time during this period did the President or any other responsible member of government rule out the use of atomic energy in war .11

The atomic bomb was a new and tremendously powerful explosive weapon, as legitimate as any other deadly explosive weapon of modern warfare. Its production was justified as a military weapon that could have catastrophic potential on the war. The exact circumstances in which atomic weapons might be used was not clear until mid 1945 when the military's use of atomic energy was connected to our national policy. The policy of the unconditional surrender of Japan increased the potential for the use of the atomic bomb. This policy made the Japanese desperate and had the "potential of leading to a long campaign where attrition on both sides would be extremely costly".12 Getting around this policy was difficult. Allied war aims were firm and change or appeasement was uncertain.

Even if this policy could not be adjusted, would Japan respond favorably to a new offer? Intelligence experts thought so and radio intercepts from Tokyo to Moscow bore them out. Concessions that would not affect allied war aims in the Pacific and be attractive to Japan were justified. These concessions could reduce the enormous cost of the war and bring about a settlement in the western Pacific before other allies were committed towards Japan's defeat.¹³ Formulating terms that would meet these conditions were difficult at best.

Considerable discussion was given to this problem in Washington in the spring of 1945. Officials from the Departments of State, War, Navy and Joseph C. Grew, acting Secretary of State, urged President Truman to issue a proclamation calling for the surrender of Japan and assuring them they could keep the Emperor. President Truman failed to act on this proposal and directed it be studies by the Cabinet and Joint Chiefs. They favored the idea. The only difference was timing. Not once in the course of their meeting was the use of the atomic bomb ruled out. They all knew that this bomb when produced would clearly be the instrument that would destroy Japan and impress on the Japanese government the hopelessness of any course but unconditional surrender. All that remained was forming a committee to study this issue and advise the President on the employment of nuclear weapons.¹⁴

The Interim Committee was formed to study the political, military and scientific aspects of atomic energy. Their main focus was on the use of atomic energy against Japan. On 1 June 1945, the Interim Committee unanimously adopted the following recommendations:

1. The bomb should be used against Japan as soon as possible
2. It should be used on a dual target - that is a military installation or war plant by or adjacent to houses and other buildings most susceptible to damage and
3. It should be used without prior warning of the nature of the weapon.¹⁵

Stimson had the ultimate task of advising the President of the committee's recommendation.

Secretary Stimson agreed in principal with all the recommendations of the Interim Committee. In a 2 July 1945 memorandum to President Truman, he outlined elements of what he thought should be contained in the warning to Japan. It was designed to "promise destruction" if Japan resisted and "hope" if she surrendered. Because of the need for secrecy, at no time was the use of the atomic bomb mentioned in his memorandum. It was, however, clear in the minds of all involved that the bomb would be the best possible sanction if the warning presented to Japan were rejected.¹⁶ Timing was II that remained.

President Truman believed that such a warning should be issued by the U.S. and the U.K. with the concurrence of the Chinese government to show "complete unity" of all the enemies of Japan. Ten days after the first atomic bomb in history was detonated in Los Alamos, New Mexico, President Truman and the

other allied leaders issued an ultimatum to Japan calling for her to immediately surrender or suffer the consequences of a "new terrible weapon".¹⁷ The Premier of Japan's rejection of this warning left the coalition no alternatives but to demonstrate their willingness to carry this ultimatum totally. For such a purpose, the atomic bomb was "an eminently suitable weapon."¹⁸

The news of the successful detonation of the first atomic bomb reached the President while he was still at the Postdam Conference. President Truman along with General Marshall and Admiral Lehay immediately conferred with Winston Churchill on this news. It was certain their forcing the unconditional surrender of Japan by invasion would cost 1,000,000 American lives and at least 500,000 British lives. The news of the atomic bomb removed the picture of this nightmare completely. In its place was a new vision. The end of the whole war in one or two violent shocks.¹⁹ There was unanimous, unquestioned, automatic agreement around the conference table to use the atomic bomb. "To avert a vast, indefinite butchery, to bring the war to an end, to give peace to the world at the miracle of deliverance."²⁰ Russia's help would no longer be needed to aid in conquering Japan. The only question that remained was what to tell Stalin. This task was left to President Truman.

Stalin was informed by Truman that the U.S. possessed a new bomb of "unusual destructive force". Stalin voiced his overwhelming satisfaction with this progress but did not press Truman for more detail. Instead, he informed Truman of peace

overtures that the Japanese had been making through Russia. Additionally, the submarine and air attacks had taken their toll of Tokyo's resolve to continue the war. American leaders, however, made no efforts to pursue the question of negotiation and continue to follow the policy of unconditional surrender.²¹ The final decision to use the atomic bomb rested with President Truman, the coalition leader who had the weapon.²²

Because the Japanese's reply to the warning issued by the allies was vague, Truman and his advisors interrupted it as a rejection and decided to go ahead with plans to drop an atomic bomb on a major Japanese city.²³ Secretary Stimson with President Truman's support finalized the list of suggested targets. The city of Kyoto was removed and four other cities including Hiroshima and Nagasaki were approved.²⁴ On 6 August 1945, a B-29 commanded by Colonel Paul Tibbets, Jr. dropped the first atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima. On 9 August 1945, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki and for all practical purposes, the war was over. The atomic bomb therefore served the exact purpose intended but, was it necessary to end World War II?

Part V. NECESSITY TO USE THE ATOMIC BOMB

With the leadership question addressed, the issue of necessity will now be explored. Was the dropping of the world's most powerful bomb on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki really necessary or could the unconditional surrender

of Japan and the end of World War II be achieved by other means?

The Anglo-American coalition in World War II was the closest and most effective partnership in war that two great powers had ever achieved.²⁶ America, Britain and the other coalition leaders were clear on the strategy needed to win World War II. The decision for the complete defeat of their enemies was never once in debate. This unanimous agreement however, was attended by controversy on how to achieve total victory. American and British leaders differed significantly on this issue. The Americans believed in concentration of power at the earliest possible moment at a decisive point and the delivery of a blow to the Solar Plexes. The British believed that the correct strategy was to work vigorously but more cautiously from a ring which sea-power and Russia's resistance enabled the Allies to close around Axis-dominated Europe; keep the Russians supplied and fighting; blast and burn the German and Italian cities with bombs; stir up resistance in the occupied countries, jab through the ring when opportunity allowed, while ever tightening it, until the enemy was so strangled and bled that the final fences need be only a coup-de-grace.²⁷

With support from Stalin and Tehran, the Americans were finally able to execute Overlord--the great and cross-Channel drive launched in June, 1944. The results after some further display of reluctance by the British was a cross-Channel drive to

the heart of Germany, and a spectacular success for the coalition.

World War II did not end with the spectacular defeat of Fascist Germany. On 8 May 1945 in Berlin, representatives of German High Command signed the act of unconditional surrender. With this act, the supreme power in Germany handed over their government to Allied powers. Germany's ally in the Far East, Imperialist Japan continued to wage war against China, the U.S. and England.

Even though Japan and the U.S.S.R. had signed a neutrality pact, Japan still help Germany in the war against the Soviets. With more than a million Japanese troops in China near the Soviet border, the U.S.S.R. was still reluctant to declare war with Japan. It was not until July, 1945 when the U.S., England, and China demanded Japan's unconditional surrender that the Soviet government out of obligation to its Allies declared a state of war with Japan.²⁸

With the newly added focus of the Soviet Union, the Allies were able to continue their campaign into the Far East. The major allied objective was control of the South China Sea and a foothold on the coast of China, so as to sever Japanese lines of communications southward and to establish bases from which Japan could be first be subjected to intensive aerial bombardment and naval blockade and then, if necessary a home island invasion.²⁹

The Allies experienced both successes and setbacks as they continued to push for unconditional surrender of Japan. MacArthur anticipated the employment of 5,000,000 men with casualties of over a million before Japan could be brought to surrender.³⁰ The Allies believed that Japan's resistance would continue to be stiffed and that two Japanese outposts needed to be captured before the final assault on Japan could . . .³¹

One of the outposts, Iwo Jima, an island in the Bonin group was approximately 750 miles from mainland Japan. Although Iwo Jima only measured four-and-a-half by two-and-a-half miles, strategically it provided a useful staging area for U.S. bombers. Likewise, it provided a dangerous fighter base if allowed to remain in Japanese hands. After the U.S. Air Force dropped nearly 7,000 tons of bombs and 22,000 shells more than 30,000 U.S. Marines stormed ashore. The battle for Iwo Jima ended when all but 216 of the 20,000 Japanese had been killed or wounded. One-third of the Americans were killed or wounded in the capture of this first outposts.³²

The next outpost, Okinawa was no less formidable for the American forces. Okinawa was 67 miles long and varied in width from 3 to 20 miles. It lies in the Ryuku group approximately 350 miles from mainland Japan. With a garrison of over 100,000 men, the U.S. assembled 300,000 troops for the assault. The battle for Okinawa lasted for 3 months. The Japanese employed the Yamato, the world's largest battleship was inevitably sunk by a succession of bombs and torpedoes on 7 April 1945. When Okinawa

was finally taken in June, 1945, 12,000 Americans had been killed and 36,000 wounded; 34 American ships had been sunk and another 368 had been damaged. There were 127,000 known Japanese dead, including their commander, who committed hara-kiri when the battle was clearly lost.³³

With adequate air bases within easy reach of mainland Japan, the U.S. Air Force intensified its air attacks on Japan. Despite the stubborn fighting which took place on the islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa at this point, Japan was near collapse. Two thirds of her merchant shipping had been sunk. Factories were halted for a lack of raw materials and coal. Food was down to an individual ration of 1200 calories per day-- below that of the Germans in the worse times during World War I. American air craft attacked Japan almost without meeting opposition. For example, in a single raid on Tokyo on 8 March, more than 83,000 people were killed--20,000 more than all the British deaths from air attack throughout the war.³⁴

With Japan clearly near defeat, was the atomic bomb necessary or a new U.S. weapon that would make a powerful statement to the rest of the world. When to aged Suzuki became Primer Minister in April, 1945, the time was right for the Allies to negotiate an end to the war with Japan on their terms. The Japanese peacemakers wanted only to avoid humiliation of unconditional surrender and to secure the preservation of the Imperial Dynasty. Stalin's failure to serve as intermediary for Japan and the Postdam Conference warning calling for Japan to

surrender or else presented no honorable way out for Suzuki or Japan.

The Japanese course of action convinced American leaders that the war must continue. Opinions among the American Counsels were divided, however, on how best to conclude the war with Japan. The naval chiefs were convinced that blockade would bring Japan to an early surrender; the air chiefs were equally confident of the effort of bombing. President Truman, on the advice of his army leaders, was still concerned that the final conquest of Japan would cost a million American casualties. The entrance of Russia into the Far Eastern War appeared to be a way for America to prevent most of its expected losses at first. American enthusiasm faded with the end of the European war. Already wrangling with the Russians over European questions, America was reluctant to be beholden to the Russians in the Far East.³⁵ By the summer of 1945, America had a new resource, the world's first atomic weapon.

For three years, America had been pushing forward with the development of a controlled nuclear explosion. With three atomic bombs now ready, it was hoped that their devastating results would drive the Japanese to surrender with the added advantage that this would drive the Japanese to surrender with the added advantage that this would take place before Soviet Russia had time to intervene. Not all Americans agreed with this conclusion. For example, General Marshall believed that the

impact of Russian entry on the already hopeless Japan may well be the decisive action levering them into capitulation.³⁶ General Eisenhower, when told of the intended use of the atomic bomb during the Postdam Conference, believed that it was "completely unnecessary". General MacArthur, who was not consulted, said later that he fully agreed with Eisenhower.³⁷

The opinions of these military leaders were irrelevant as President Truman and a few men involved in producing the bombs made the decision on their use. The desire to anticipate or to warn the Russians was a side issue for its use. The decisive factor was that once the bombs were developed, they had to be used. As one high authority wrote:

The bomb simply had to be used - so much money had been expended on it. Had it failed, how would we have explained the huge expenditure? Think of the public outcry there would have been . . . The relief to everyone concerned when the bomb was finished and dropped was enormous.³⁸

Russian analysis believed that the dropping of two atomic bombs on 6 and 9 August 1945 on Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a barbaric example of the use of an atomic weapon, not provoked by military necessity. They concluded that by dropping the bombs on the Japanese cities, the U.S. imperialists were trying to frighten the whole world, especially the Soviet Union.³⁹ This, in my opinion, marked the beginning of aggression between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.

When President Truman learned that the first atomic bomb had been successfully dropped on Hiroshima, he described it as the biggest thing in history. America looked at the use of the atomic bomb against Japan with peculiar satisfaction. They had no fierce moral indignation or desire for revenge against Germany or Italy. But, with the humiliation of Pearl Harbor, they were ruthlessly determined to exact unconditional surrender from Japan.

The second of three atomic bombs was dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. Seventy-one-thousand Japanese were killed instantaneously. Those who died later from wounds, burns, or leukemia have never been counted. Even with this devastation, Japanese military chiefs still insisted that continued resistance might secure "honorable conditions". On 9 August, the third and final atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Eighty-thousand Japanese were killed. This, together with the Soviet intervention Manchuria provoked the decision for Japan's surrender. On 14 August 1945, Japan agreed to unconditional surrender, with the condition that the Emperor's position would be preserved. With the use of two atomic bombs, World War II was finally over.

Part VI. CONCLUSION

The responsibility and the necessity of deciding to use the world's first atomic weapons was monumental. The final decision was the President's alone and he faced it squarely. However, before President Truman made the decision that would change modern warfare, he had to determine if measures already

consummated would produce the unconditional surrender of Japan in a timely and costly manner. Because these measures in Truman's mind could not achieve these objectives, he had to decide whether circumstances warranted employment of a bomb that had been labeled by Stimson as "the most terrible weapon ever known in human history".

The deep concern that Stimson and other advisors share over the high cost of an invasion, the political effects of Soviet intervention and the consequences of using the atomic bomb significantly impacted their recommendations to the President. The most difficult dilemma was the requirement for Japan's unconditional surrender. This condition alone had the potential of causing a long campaign of attrition that would be extremely costly on both sides. The advice that Stimson and his panel provided to the President was critical in his decision to use the atomic bomb.

Secretary Stimson and his advisors had access to all the facts, the plans for the invasion, the estimates of probable casualties and the number of expected efficiencies of the atomic weapons. Their conclusions were based on deep convictions of what they thought was best for the country.⁴⁰ The leaders who decided to use the atomic bomb did so in hopes of ending the war with as few casualties as possible. Stimson and his panel of scientist also focused their attention on the future beyond the bomb's first use. To Stimson, the atomic bombs were "a new and tremendously powerful explosive, as legitimate as any other deadly explosive of modern warfare".

Initially, military leaders were blind to the potential of this new weapon. Their argument of the uncertainty of whether the bomb would actually go off initially ruled out the use of the atomic bomb to defeat Japan. They instead, focused on an invasion that would permit the application of ground, naval and air resources. The naval chiefs were convinced that a blockade would bring Japan to an early surrender, the air chiefs were just as confident that a bombing campaign would have the same effect. Moreover, General Marshall stated on 18 June 1945, "the impact of Russian entry on an already hopeless Japan may well be the decisive action levering the Japanese into capitulation".⁴¹ General Eisenhower during the Postdam Conference stated that the bomb was "completely unnecessary". MacArthur later agreed with him.

President Truman's argument that extensive loss of lives and expanding the war did not fully justify the use of the atomic bomb. By this point, Japan was well on her way to defeat. The battles for Okinawa and Iwo Jima were costly to Japan in both manpower and war materials. The capture of these islands also gave the strategic advantage to the U.S. air campaign. Japan had lost two-thirds of her merchant ships, and her factory operations were halted due to lack of coal and raw materials. Food was scarce and Japan was calling on Stalin to serve as intermediary to end the war months before the world's first atomic bomb was dropped.

By mid 1945, Japan was clearly in a weaken state and was ready to surrender. Stalin's unwillingness to serve as intermediary and the coalition's strong desire to end the war through unconditional surrender perpetuated the use of the atomic bomb. Political concerns of Russian intrusion into the last stages of a war they had not fought, high casualties and the expense of developing the bomb were factors prompting President Truman's decision.

Key military leaders of World War II strengthens my conclusion that the use of the atomic bomb was unnecessary. Timely negotiations with Japan on the preservation of the Imperial Dynasty; the naval blockade and air campaign and easing the policy of unconditional surrender would have produced equal results. A home island invasion and the use of the atomic bomb would have been unnecessary. Although the use of the atomic bomb to end World War II saved American lives, the decision to use it was more political than military.

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